

Parable Of The Good Shepherd (Part One)

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Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah prepared people to think of Him as a Shepherd (Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23; 37:24). In John 10:1, Jesus explains that the shepherd enters by the gate, the lawful way of going into a sheep pen as opposed to some other way. By this, He contrasts himself with false messiahs, who by deceitful claims seek to steal sheep or who presumptuously try to exert control over the people. Jesus Christ came as the legitimate Heir of the chosen seed and fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament.

In this two-part study on the Parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-30), we will briefly analyze qualities of Jesus Christ the Shepherd, who came to gather into one flock—God's Family or church—the scattered children of God. John uses a wider principle than Matthew, Mark, and Luke do in their parables of a shepherd and his sheep. The three synoptic gospels emphasize the careful concern that the shepherd feels for them, but John emphasizes the sovereignty of Christ as the Shepherd. He is the great and benevolent Ruler and Owner of all His sheep.

1. Why is Jesus Christ the personification of the *Good* Shepherd? John 10:10, 14-15.

Comment: As the Good Shepherd, He died for earth's sinners, who like sheep have gone astray. *Good*, as used here, means more than having goodness in a physical sense but also having an excellent nature (Exodus 33:19-20). It signifies what is morally beautiful, noble, and true (Exodus 34:6-7). Christ's use of the word in this parable implies that He perfects all godly attributes in others; He is the Good Shepherd who manifests the characteristics of perfect goodness. He guides and supports His sheep, and sacrifices Himself for them. His benevolence exceeds all others (Psalm 31:19).

2. Why is Jesus Christ the epitome of the *Great* Shepherd? John 10:15, 17-18.

Comment: When Jesus came in the flesh, He emphasized that He had been sent by the Father, and His authority, offices, purposes, plans, and power were received from Him. All this was done with Jesus' complete acceptance and agreement (Philippians 2:5-8); He did not come reluctantly but with purpose and zeal. As the Great Shepherd, He sacrificed Himself, rose from the grave, and ascended to heaven, where He now intercedes for His sheep (Hebrews 7:25; 10:5-10; 13:20-21). Both the Father and His Son are one in Their love for the sheep, and so the Son came to seek and to save those who were lost.

3. Why is Jesus Christ the embodiment of the *Ruling* Shepherd? John 10:27-28.

Comment: As the *Ruling* Shepherd, He will return to reward His under-shepherds who were faithful in their care of the flock (I Peter 2:25; 5:2, 4). The shepherd is the symbol of the king, and in this regard, it is interesting to note how many of Israel's kings, patriarchs, and prophets began as shepherds. Jesus does not mix His metaphors when He exhorts His disciples, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Three figures of speech combine to form the ideal kingship familiar in ancient times: the perfect king was shepherd of his flock, the loving

father of his family, and commanding ruler of his country. Thus, when Jesus says with authority, "I am the good Shepherd," the qualities of shepherd, parent, and ruler are seen combined in Him (John 10:11, 14).

4. Why must a good shepherd *own* his sheep? John 10:4, 14, 16.

Comment: A sheep pen often held several flocks, with each flock having its own shepherd. When the time came to take his flock to its pasture, each shepherd separated his sheep from the others by making a unique call. Instead of driving them, he led them, and they followed him as one unit. The shepherd always went before them to guide them to the most beneficial pasture and to protect them from danger.

Jesus' references to the sheep are personal: "His own sheep" (verse 4), "My sheep" (verse 14), and "other sheep I have" (verse 16). Everyone is owned by the Creator God. The Father is the "Author of Creation" (Isaiah 40:28; 43:15), and the One who later became known as the Son, Jesus Christ, is the Word, through whom Creation was brought into existence and the work done (Psalm 102:25; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-19; Hebrews 1:2, 10; Revelation 4:11). As such, His sheep are very familiar to Him and bear the mark of ownership—unconditional obedience and submission.

In Part Two, we will look deeper into the relationship that exists between the Shepherd and His sheep. We will see how important it is for Him to know, lead, give His life for, and give life to His sheep.